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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION: UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (HABITAT II)

Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the regional commissions on the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) at the regional level

SUMMARY

The General Assembly, in its resolution 49/109 of 19 December 1994 on the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), requested the regional commissions to include in their programme of activities for 1995 an item on the preparations for the Conference, with particular emphasis on preparations in their respective regions, and to submit a report on those preparations to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session. The present report reviews key activities for 1995 and what remains to be done in 1996.

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I. BACKGROUND

1. By its resolution 47/180 of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly decided to convene the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) from 3 to 14 June 1996, at the highest possible level of participation. The Assembly also decided, in the same resolution, to establish a preparatory committee of the General Assembly for the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), open to all States Members of the United Nations and members of the specialized agencies, with the participation of observers in accordance with the established practice of the General Assembly.

2. At its first substantive session the Preparatory Committee for the Conference noted that the United Nations regional commissions had a central role to play at the regional level in the preparatory process, the Conference itself and beyond. That role should include, among other matters:

(a) Coordinating and facilitating regional activities, including regional meetings, through a work programme over the next two years;

(b) Enabling Member States with limited institutional and financial capacity to participate effectively in the preparatory process and in the Conference;

(c) Liaison and preparation of a regional report on the state of human settlements, highlighting cross-sectoral and cross-country concerns.

3. The General Assembly, in its resolution 49/109 of 19 December 1994, requested the regional commissions to include in their programme of activities for 1995 an item on the preparations for the Conference, with particular emphasis on preparations in their respective regions, and to submit a report on those preparations to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session.

4. The purpose of the present report is to review the activities of the regional commissions in response to resolution 49/109. The report is structured in accordance with the three types of regional-level activities assigned to the regional commissions by the Preparatory Committee for the Conference at its first session.

II. COORDINATION AND FACILITATION OF REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

A. Economic Commission for Africa

5. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) participated in the subregional Ministerial Meeting for Eastern and Southern Africa on Preparations for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), which was held at Kampala from 26 to 28 February 1995. The meeting was jointly organized by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the Government of Uganda, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Shelter Afrique. Participants at the meeting reviewed the preparatory process

at the subregional level and adopted a declaration to help chart a course to make the Conference relevant to African countries.

6. In addition, the Commission participated in the subregional Ministerial Meeting for Central Africa on Preparations for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), which was held at Brazzaville from 10 to 12 April 1995. The meeting was jointly organized by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the Government of the Congo, with support from UNDP and the Organization for the Promotion and Management of Real Estate in the Congo. The Ministers resolved to take the necessary steps to facilitate the implementation of the objectives of the Conference and adopted a declaration at the meeting.

7. The Commission will co-sponsor, together with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the Government of South Africa, the Organization of African Unity, Shelter Afrique, UNDP and the African Development Bank, the Regional Ministerial Meeting for Africa on Preparations for the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), to be held at Johannesburg, from 16 to 18 October 1995. The meeting will primarily review previous regional and subregional declarations and consolidate Africa's position on key issues in the preparatory process for the Conference, including strategies and mechanisms for appropriate follow-up actions.

B. Economic Commission for Europe

8. The Committee on Human Settlements of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) established a task force to assist it in carrying out the preparatory work for the Conference. The first meeting of the task force was organized at Istanbul in March 1995 by the Housing Development Administration of Turkey, in cooperation with the Chairman of the task force. The following topics were discussed at the meeting: (a) evaluation of current trends and policies; (b) participation and democracy as the basis for action; (c) economic role of cities; and (d) regional plan of action. The meeting also considered the question of preparations for the Conference in countries in transition. In that regard, information was provided on the application of housing indicators in countries in transition.

9. A regional workshop on housing and urban indicators for countries in transition was organized at Budapest in June 1995. The meeting was sponsored by the Commission and the United States Agency for International Development.

10. The fourth meeting of Ministers from countries in transition responsible for human settlements was held at Budapest on 13 and 14 June 1995. The meeting was organized by the Government of Hungary in cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the Commission. The meeting reviewed the preparations for the Conference and formulated common goals and commitments to be achieved and implemented in connection with two of the main themes of the Conference. The countries in transition committed themselves to the recommendations of Agenda 21, the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit for Social Development and the results of the first and second sessions of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations

Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), as well as to the resolutions adopted by the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements at its fifteenth session. The Commission was invited to prepare a plan for regional follow-up activities to the Conference, to be included in the Global Plan of Action. The position of countries in transition on the key issues of the preparatory activities for the Conference was reflected in the Budapest Declaration adopted at the meeting of Ministers from countries in transition responsible for human settlements.

11. A workshop for mayors of prominent cities of ECE member States is to be convened, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, at the beginning of 1996. The workshop will consider innovative visions, practices and actions towards urban sustainability. It will also analyse innovative approaches for exemplary urban interventions and the mobilization of various partners for achieving a sustainable city.

C. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

12. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has provided for the funding of regional preparations in its regular budget for 1995 and has sought donor funding for the second meeting of the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, which is envisaged to provide regional input to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). In accordance with the decision of the Ministerial Conference on Urbanization in Asia, which was held at Bangkok from 27 October to 2 November 1993, the second meeting of the Forum should be convened in 1995-1996 well before the Conference. The Forum would serve as a platform for all actors to exchange ideas and experience and to discuss policy approaches and options that should be pursued in solving specific urban issues requiring urgent attention. As an interface with the international community, it could serve as a mechanism for reviewing ongoing regional assistance programmes and their relevance to countries, and help to make those programmes more transparent and demand-driven. It is proposed to convene the Forum once every two years.

13. The objectives of the second meeting of the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum would, therefore, be the following:

(a) To review progress in the implementation of the Regional Plan of Action on Urbanization, which was adopted by the above-mentioned Ministerial Conference, and to discuss strategies for strengthening dialogue and partnerships at the country level;

(b) To review the ongoing and planned regional assistance programmes of donor and international agencies within and outside the United Nations system;

(c) To finalize the contribution of the Asia and Pacific region to the Conference.

14. The Asia-Pacific Urban Forum is organized by ESCAP, with the financial assistance of UNDP and in partnership with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the Regional Network of Local Authorities for the

Management of Human Settlements, the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, the Regional Network of Human Settlements Research and Training Institutes and the Asian Forum of Environmental Journalists. The Government of Australia will provide funding for organizing and convening the Forum. Contributions are also expected from the Asian Development Bank.

D. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

15. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has contributed to the organization of the third Regional Meeting of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, which took place at Quito from 16 to 18 November 1994. At that meeting, the main issues and policy options regarding human settlements in Latin America and the Caribbean were analysed, and future activities at the country level, as well as the policy issues likely to emerge during the preparation process for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), were discussed.

16. The Commission made presentations to non-governmental organizations, especially to the second Latin American and Caribbean Conference of Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations, on the issues before Habitat II.

17. The regional preparatory meeting for Habitat II will be organized by ECLAC at Santiago in November 1995. Participation by a large number of Latin American and Caribbean countries is expected, together with delegations representing the private sector, non-governmental organizations, city authorities, universities, community representatives and others. Participants at the meeting will analyse the state of human settlements in the region, exchange experiences and prepare the policy framework for the next development stage, as well as prepare the regional input to the Global Plan of Action for Human Settlements.

18. The fourth Regional Meeting of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean will be held at Santiago on 16 and 17 November 1995. The meeting will discuss and endorse the conclusions and recommendations of the regional preparatory meeting for the Conference.

E. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

19. As a follow-up to the recommendations of the second Arab Preparatory Session for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Abu Dhabi from 9 to 12 October 1994, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the Regional Preparatory Expert Group Meeting for the Conference, in cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the Technical Secretariat of the Council of Arab Ministers of Housing and Reconstruction of the League of Arab States, the Housing and Urban Development Corporation, the Urban Management Programme, the Regional Office for Arab States and the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe. The meeting was held at Amman from 23 to 26 January 1995. Participants at the meeting reviewed the current housing

situation in the Arab region, assessed policies and programmes on the sustainable development of human settlements and made relevant proposals and practical suggestions. Recommendations on the following issues were drafted at the meeting: sustainable development policies for human settlements and purpose and structure of national reports to be submitted to the Conference. Recommendations on the form and content of the draft Arab declaration on human settlements were also formulated and general guidelines provided to enable the Commission to recast the draft declaration.

20. The amended version of the draft declaration will be distributed to Arab countries through the League of Arab States and then submitted to the third Arab Preparatory Session, to be held in October 1995. The declaration will be adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers of Housing and Reconstruction at its thirteenth session, which is to take place in November 1995.

III. ENABLING MEMBER STATES WITH LIMITED INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL CAPACITY TO PARTICIPATE EFFECTIVELY IN THE PREPARATORY PROCESS AND IN THE CONFERENCE

A. Economic Commission for Africa

21. In December 1994 and January 1995 a number of missions were undertaken to Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, the Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Zambia. The Commission assisted these countries in the preparation of their work programmes for national preparations, reports and plans of action.

B. Economic Commission for Europe

22. The Commission will support activities on the application of housing and urban indicators in countries in transition. The experience of the Hungarian Metropolitan Research Institute in this field will be made available to the countries of central Europe and other countries.

C. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

23. In support of the country-level preparatory process, the Commission promotes the organization of local, subnational, national and regional urban forums which would serve as platforms for various urban actors to exchange ideas and concerns, to discuss policy approaches and options, to develop modalities of collaborative actions and enhance the coordination of activities among urban actors. At the national level, Nepal, Pakistan and Thailand are considering organizing urban forums, while at the local level, Bangalore, Dhaka, Karachi and Songkha are preparing to organize such forums.

24. The Commission prepared a pamphlet on the concept of urban forums and distributed it widely to national and local governments, non-governmental organizations, research and training institutes and individual experts in the region.

25. The Commission will document the experiences of urban forums as case-studies for dissemination. Furthermore, a regional workshop on establishing and operationalizing urban forums is planned for July 1995 to exchange experiences among coordinators of established urban forums and those wanting to initiate them in their cities and countries.

D. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

26. The Commission has provided assistance to a number of countries, including Argentina, Mexico and Chile, in the start-up of their national preparations for Habitat II.

27. The Commission made its most recent contact with member countries on 27 March 1995 in order to monitor their progress in the preparatory process for Habitat II and to be informed of the setting up of national committees for the preparatory process and their activities.

IV. LIAISON AND PREPARATION OF A REGIONAL REPORT ON THE STATE OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, HIGHLIGHTING CROSS-SECTORAL AND CROSS-COUNTRY CONCERNS

A. Economic Commission for Africa

28. The Commission and Shelter Afrique have agreed that the continental shelter report will be jointly prepared for consideration by the Regional Ministerial Meeting for Africa on Preparations for the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) to be held at Johannesburg, from 16 to 18 October 1995.

29. The Commission will begin drafting the regional report on the state of human settlements as soon as funds become available.

B. Economic Commission for Europe

30. The Commission will submit the following publications to the Conference: (a) guidelines for sustainable human settlements planning and management; (b) guidelines for land administration; (c) strategies for implementing renewal and modernization policies; (d) a multisectoral regional overview entitled "Towards a sustainable human settlements development in the ECE region"; and (e) a report on the Meeting of Experts on Human Settlements Problems in Southern Europe, together with the Housing Policy Guidelines.

C. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

31. The substantive contribution of ESCAP to the Conference, in addition to the Regional Plan of Action on Urbanization, is a publication entitled Living in Asian Cities: 20 Years of Innovation and Policy Evolution. The publication

contains a series of articles prepared by eminent practitioners and experts in the field of urban studies from the region.

32. The draft chapters of the publication will be submitted to the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum. The publication will eventually be submitted to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) as a review of past experiences and future trends in low-income housing in Asia and the Pacific.

D. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

33. The Commission has prepared a report on the state of human settlements, which will be submitted to the regional preparatory meeting for Habitat II, to be organized by ECLAC and held at Santiago in November 1995.